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ENTERTAINING A PRINCE

A STORY OF WESTERN CANADA

BY HULBERT FOOTNER

AS soon as the news was bruited up and down Roland Avenue, that typically Western thoroughfare, trade at the mayor's shop showed a perceptible increase. Mayor Pink was a nice little man and a born grocer. He was conspicuous for the domestic virtues, and his speech was innocent alike of initial h's and terminating g's. He went direct from the counter to the council-chamber, and exchanged his grocer's apron for the gold chain of office, so to speak; because there was no gold chain in Blackfoot as yet.

Conversations of this trend might have been heard over the counter almost any time during those few days:

"Those prunes you sent me last week were all dried up, Your Worship."

"Very sorry, Mrs. 'All. I 'll see that it don't occur again."

"Send me a pot of marmalade and a tin of wafers. I hear that a member of the royal family is coming to town."

"Yes, Mrs. 'All; 'Is Royal 'Ighness Prince 'Arold is passin' through Blackfoot next week. What else, Mrs. 'All?"

"Let me see—two pounds of butter; and see that it is perfectly fresh, Your Worship—and—you 'll have to entertain him, won't you?"

"Yes, we 'll 'ave to give 'im a reception. We 're 'avin' a little meetin' on Thursday night to discuss the arrangements. Can I send you a package of that Golden Sky coffee, Mrs. 'All?"

"No, indeed! It 's more than half chickory, Your Worship. I suppose you 'll shake hands with him."

"Indeed, you 're mistaken, Mrs. 'All. Senator Cochrane won't 'ave no other brand in 'is 'ouse. Yes; as the represen-

tative of the citizens of Blackfoot, I shall 'ave to receive 'Is 'Ighness."

"Only fancy! Well, send me two pounds, Your Worship; but if it 's no better than the last—be sure to get a place where I can get a good look at him."

"That I will, Mrs. 'All."

THE meeting of the reception committee was held up-stairs in the fire hall on Thursday night, as the citizens' band happened to be using the council chamber for their weekly practice. In addition to the mayor and the city clerk, there were present Aldermen Sam Puffer, Hank Wills, and Telfair; also Major Coombs of the militia; and last, but not least, the redoubtable Cappy Gunn of the fire department, the time-honored master of ceremonies on such occasions. It was Cappy Gunn who, when the Prince of Wales passed through Blackfoot two years ago, got up that highly successful luncheon at Corey's short-order restaurant, opposite the station. Corey put out an extra supply of fly-paper in honor of the royal guest; and the "Eye-Opener" printed a story to the effect that H. R. H. thought it was a kind of currant cake. But no one takes the "Eye-Opener" seriously.

Besides, Blackfoot had outgrown all that sort of thing. We have now Alderman Telfair, who was a great society man in the East, a leading citizen of Tuscarora, Michigan, to show us what to do. The alderman was not slow in perceiving the need of just such a man as himself on this occasion; and he rose to it manfully, taking the program into his own hands, and so impressing the other members of the committee with the propriety of his

suggestions that not a voice was raised in protest, not even the voice of Sam Puffer, who represented the unregenerate old-timer's element. Cappy Gunn was conciliated by being given *carte blanche* in the matter of decorations—up to two hundred dollars.

It was indeed a proper program that they drew up. As Blackfoot's only city hall is also the police court, it was quickly decided that holding the exercises there would be to call up unpleasant associations for some of the invited guests, and the band-stand in the railway gardens was chosen for the scene of the fête. It was decided to have all the little girls in white pinafores and red sashes, and as many of the little boys as could be made presentable, massed below the stand to sing patriotic airs accompanied by the Salvation Army band, which was more reliable than the citizens'. Then, after the addresses had been read, it was arranged to take the Prince for a little drive about town, visiting the abattoir and the new brewery by the way, and ending with a review of the Blackfoot fire department, out of consideration for Cappy Gunn.

Oh, the knotty questions that were discussed at that meeting! For instance, the red carpet: the longest strip in town would not nearly reach from the station platform to the band-stand; and the committee was in grave doubt as to the propriety of allowing His Royal Highness to risk wetting his feet in the grass. Then there was the warmest kind of a discussion over what the children should sing; it was a tie between "Canada, My Canada," and "Rule, Britannia!" It was not known for sure that the Salvation Army could play these secular tunes. First one member of the committee then another lifted up his voice in a more or less wabbly rendition of his favorite song, to show the others how it would go. The firemen down-stairs, thinking that some one must be "setting 'em up" to the committee, poked their heads through the hole in the floor to make sure they were not missing any refreshment. Finally, there was that most delicate question—What should the members of the reception committee wear? When this was brought up, Alderman Telfair glanced anxiously at Sam Puffer: the old cow-puncher's expression was both eloquent and ominous.

The mayor averted an immediate explosion by hastily saying that of course 'igh 'ats were the thing, and he was going to wear one; but he would leave it to each member to suit himself in the matter.

Alderman Sam Puffer had taken no part in the discussion hitherto except to register his disapproval of the entire proceedings by spitting disgustedly to the right and left. His silence was the more remarkable in that there was a standing feud between him and Alderman Telfair, who was running this affair. Telfair represented the new order of things that was making Blackfoot a commercial center of the West; Sam Puffer was a relic of the roaring past when Blackfoot had been the wildest town in the lee of the Rockies. Telfair was all that was respectable and pious, Sam Puffer all that was disreputable and profane. It is true that Cappy Gunn and Hank Wills were old-timers, too; but they found it profitable to accept the material benefits of the new régime. Old Sam stood alone for the old hard-swearing, hard-riding, hard-drinking days of the past, when everything was owned in common; he hated the stout, "baby-faced tenderfoot," as he called him, who was always for doing the respectable, and yet could skin you out of the gold in your teeth. Yet he was a good deal in awe of him, too.

The little mayor breathed a sigh of relief when the meeting broke up without any unpleasantness. As for Sam Puffer, he made straight for the bar of the Royal Hotel, and there, with his elbow on his own particular corner of the mahogany, he rapidly engulphed several somethings to take the sickly taste out of his mouth, and then proceeded to lay out a program for the Prince as he would carry it out. It would surely have proved a liberal education to the royal youngster.

The great day dawned splendidly, and all Blackfoot turned out except the bed-ridden. Evidences of Cappy Gunn's taste and ingenuity were to be seen on every hand, particularly in the striking banners stretched across the street, with mottoes of his own composition painted in fancy letters on cotton: "Welcome to Blackfoot," "Come Again," "God Save the King"—the same kind of banners that are tacked on the side of picnic busses. In the railway gardens, which lie between

Front Street and the C. P. R. tracks, was a complicated scheme of flags which had been hastily borrowed from a town His Highness had previously visited; and was in turn to be forwarded down the line immediately after the ceremonies. Cappy Gunn, who had had long experience in these matters, believed in an accidental, "bunchy" effect; and he had certainly obtained it with the flags. The centerpiece of his composition was the bandstand, of course: there that somewhat chopfallen mountain lion which couches in the Blackfoot bar on ordinary days occupied the place of honor on a table, with potted flowers ranged around, and those handsome chairs from the hotel office in a circle, presumably so the guests could sit and look at the beast.

In the foreground the gardens were thronged with fluttering white "pinnies"; the select of Blackfoot, including the mayor's best customers, took up places on the other side of the bandstand; and the general public was roped off in the rear. The bishop's ample calves, distinctly aware of their importance in holding up the representative of the national church on this momentous occasion, occupied a position apart on the lawn; and Cappy Gunn, wearing a greasy uniform and an air of anxious importance, and turning over a quid large enough to last him through the ceremonies, was everywhere at once. Over the fence, in the street, waited a squad of mounted police, businesslike and soldierly in their red tunics, each man sitting stiffly on his splendid horse with his carbine on his knee.

On the other side of the gardens lay the railway platform, and here, a full half-hour before the train was due, gathered the members of the reception committee, variously and wonderfully attired. The mayor's hint had been sufficient to cause silk hats of rare species to bloom on every head except one: Alderman Hank Wills wore a new frock-coat of his own design, reaching to his calves and of an extraordinary satiny sheen, and the top of *his* stalk bore a low-crowned bowler. He was delighted with the sensation he caused, and blew his nose loudly and frequently into an immense bandana handkerchief. Among other little novelties of costume might be mentioned Alderman Canning's dress waistcoat, worn

over a brilliant, spotted shirt bosom, and Alderman Porter's famous lemon-colored shoes. It was a handsome aggregation, and the mayor was proud. Sam Puffer was not in evidence.

During the long wait, the committee stood around, perspiring freely and very much at a loss whether to take its gloves off or put them on—or take them off again. Alderman Telfair, the oracle of etiquette, constituted himself guard of honor to the red carpet, the wonderful brilliancy of which fascinated all the stray dogs in town. But at last the whistle of the royal train was heard from up the valley, a spasm of expectation shook the crowd, and those of the reception committee who had their gloves on nervously began to pull them off, while those who had their gloves off attempted frantically to get them on. The little mayor felt that his great hour had arrived; a bright red spot appeared on each cheek, and his lips moved tremblingly over the little phrases of welcome he had committed to memory.

What was his dismay at this moment to behold old Sam Puffer loaf down the platform, an only too familiar figure in his old brown suit, with his battered cowpuncher hat on the back of his head, his thumbs stuck in his waistband, and the inevitable ragged cigar between his teeth. This was a sorry sight for royal eyes. The mayor shuddered. The little man, for all his nervous manner, was not lacking in courage; he and the burly Sam Puffer had had more than one passage at arms in the council-chamber, in which the mayor had not always come off second best; but there was no time to do anything then, for at that moment the royal train swept into view.

It was a gorgeous train of seven, shiny cherry-colored cars, the pride of the great railway which built it. It flashed past the waiting committee—sleeping, dining, stateroom cars, wide-windowed, and luxurious, culminating in the wonderful royal car "Ulster," with the King's arms splendidly emblazoned on its sides and two little royal standards fluttering over the observation platform.

The train came to a stop with the rear platform resting mathematically opposite the sacred red carpet. The reception committee stood on one foot and then the other. Two nice-looking young men

jumped off, cast a quick glance around, then pulled themselves aboard. There was a wait of half a minute while the reception committee coughed nervously. Alderman Hank Wills relieved his pent-up feelings by a sonorous blast into the red handkerchief. Then a third lad, younger and less sure of himself than the first two, descended from the car somewhat awkwardly and stood by the steps, blushing furiously. He was of less than medium height and boyishly slim; he wore a plain dark suit and a little derby, which may have been the latest thing in London, but was considered very much out of date in Blackfoot.

There was a disconcerting pause. No one knew exactly what to do next. The young man seemed to be of two minds, whether to advance or retreat, like a child on the threshold of a roomful of strangers. Finally the mayor, feeling that the situation hung on him, stepped forward and politely asked:

"Is 'Is 'Ighness comin' off?"

The young man turned pinker still.

"Why,—I—I," he stammered.

The little mayor, realizing his mistake, turned very pale. But how was he to have known better? The photographs of the young man in the newspapers had pictured him both broad and tall in his resplendent uniform. Every word of the mayor's little speech forsook him, of course; only the tradesman's instinct remained. He whipped off his hat and, moving toward the gate to the gardens, murmured:

"Step this way, please."

The procession moved down through the lane of townspeople, the members of the Prince's suite, who seemed to have difficulty in concealing their amusement at something (could it have been the costumes of the committee?) falling in behind with the aldermen. Alderman Telfair, the well-fed apostle of progress in Blackfoot, took care to secure a place close to the royal back, on which he fixed his eyes with an expression of wistful awe, which, in one so stout, was almost pathetic. Last of all, in his old, brown suit, chewing his cigar with a derisive leer, came old Sam Puffer.

When the people began to cheer, the young Prince took heart of grace again. This was something he knew. The fixed

smile and the gracious, unseeing little bows to the right and left were part of his education. The people, delighted with these evidences of affability, redoubled their huzzas; and the Prince, encouraged in turn, patted everything on the head, so to speak, from the littlest girl in a white pinny, who shrank awestruck from the royal hand, to the chop-fallen mountain lion in the band-stand. He walked very slowly, as he had been taught; and chatted animatedly with the little mayor, whose cup of happiness was running over. The occasion was now an assured success; he forgot Sam Puffer lurking in the rear.

When the procession reached the band-stand, the Salvation Army struck up "God Save the King," and all the white pinnies lustily lifted up their voices. The east half was a full bar ahead of the west half, while the band was somewhere in between; but their loyalty was indubitable. The young Prince stood at the edge of the stand and beamed down on them, turning to the mayor continually to express his gratification. He knew his part. When the children finished their song, the mayor read his famous address, which had been shown around town during several previous days. It was a wonderfully engrossed affair, with mysterious little water colors down one side, and topping the whole, an emaciated Britannia in a sort of red wrapper sitting on sheaves of grain.

"To 'Is Royal 'Ighness Prince 'Arold. On be'alf of the citizens of Blackfoot, I desire to express to Your Royal 'Ighness," etc. The h's clattered on the band-stand floor like peas. But the address was exactly right; it breathed stertorous, beef-and-beer, prayer-book loyalty in every line. There was neither a word more nor less than was expected.

When the mayor concluded, the Prince's equerry handed the young gentleman his answer; and he read the set phrases in a charming, boyish voice, that drew the hearts of all who could hear, and somehow made them sorry for the lad who was obliged to endure such silly ceremonies day after day. His reply answered the address so squarely, paragraph by paragraph, that it seemed quite magical to his hearers, unless it happened to occur to them that a copy of the mayor's address might have been sent up the line.

There was a rousing cheer when the Prince finished reading and the Salvation Army enthusiastically struck up something: it was hard to say just what, but they were not accustomed to secular airs. The mayor introduced Prince Harold to the various local celebrities in the band-stand. He, the mayor, was now miserably aware of the bulk of Sam Puffer, half-hidden by a flag, and effectually blocking egress from the band-stand. A dozen futile plans to steer the royal guest safely past the profane old cattle-puncher who feared neither God nor prince suggested themselves; but in vain: the mayor felt in his bones that something would happen—and something did.

He delayed the evil moment as long as possible. He showed the Prince the glorious peaks off to the west, he pointed out this object and that in the street below. He steered the Prince all round the stand, hoping to draw Sam Puffer out of his corner and then slip past. But old Sam bided his time. Finally the Prince's gentlemen began to grow uneasy, thinking the mayor had lost his head through stage fright: the equerry softly inquired if they should not proceed. Then there was no help for it; and the mayor moved perforce to the head of the steps, taking care to keep between old Sam and the sacred person of royalty. He was silently praying to his respectable gods to come to his aid; but this time they heard him not.

Old Sam stepped out and bared his great head respectfully.

"Your Royal Highness—" he began.

The boyish Prince smiled his fixed smile and took a polite listening attitude. The little mayor was in an agony. The mild introduction disarmed him and confirmed his worst fears. The next words were enough—

"You 've rounded up your steers and corralled 'em in good shape," continued Sam; "now come and have a bit of a blow. A young feller like you ought to be havin' a whale of a time seein' God's own country. I don't believe yeh are, and I 'm goin' to give it to yeh, if yeh 'll let me."

Sam paused to spit over the rail, and a horrible silence fell on the group in the band-stand. The Prince looked extremely red and flustered: his education evidently

had not provided for this combination of circumstances. The little mayor made as if to brush past with his charge; but old Sam put forth a great ham of a hand and held him where he was. Sam had been holding himself on the snaffle up to this, as his purple face clearly showed. When he broke out again it was as if the reins were loosed a trifle.

"I 've kep' my mouth shet all this time because I 'm in a minority, and I did n't want to do nothin' to queer the show. But I don't want yeh to think we 're *all* a crowd of blank-blank old women what don't know no better than to trot out a bunch of squawkin' little dish-washers to amuse a young feller like you.

"Come with me, Prince, and I 'll show yeh a man's fun. I got a little mare down the sreet with a disposition like Mary Magdalen after she got religion. She kin take us out to my ranch in twenty minutes. Out there I got a bunch of blank-blank cow-punchers as 'll throw a crazy steer in more ways than you have names, and in less time than Your Royal Highness takes to spit. And I brought a lot of Sarcees over from the reservation to ride races fer yeh. The blank-blank redskins will break their blank necks for half a dollar."

When Sam concluded his invitation, the silence on the band-stand was as thick as cheese. The young Prince was in an agony of embarrassment. One could see by his eyes that he longed to accept, and was restrained only by the fear of political complications, that bugbear of young princes. He did not know whether Sam Puffer was a supporter of the present government; and of course Sam was not. An old campaigner in the Prince's suite, a famous general, who, in his mufti, looked like a farmer, attempted to relieve this intolerable situation. He threw back his head with a shout of derisive laughter, exclaiming, "Capital! Capital!"

The other members of the Prince's suite took their cue from the old soldier, and promptly joined in the burst of ridicule at old Sam's expense. The ridicule of this high-toned crowd was the one thing that could daunt the old cow-puncher. He fell back a step discomfited. But in so cleverly choosing the means to squelch Sam, the wily general neglected to calculate the effect on his young charge. The

Prince was a kind-hearted lad, and the distress occasioned by the sight of Sam's discomfiture supplied just the needed fillip to his initiative. The unnecessarily loud laughter nettled him. He turned to his party and said spiritedly:

"This gentleman has been good enough to extend an invitation. I should like to accept it."

"But, Your Highness," expostulated the equerry, "we have only two hours longer here. A drive through the streets, with a visit to the brewery and the abattoir, has been arranged."

"Very much obliged, I am sure," re-

turned the Prince, calmly; "but I should prefer to omit the abattoir and the brewery." He turned to Sam. "Will you lead the way, Alderman? I should like to see your mare."

Five minutes later Prince Harold was speeding Sam's mare over the Weasel Head Trail en route to the Puffer ranch, while his host leaned back with an arm extended on the back of the seat, luxuriously puffing a royal cigar. Away behind on the prairie trailed a miscellaneous lot of lords, a mayor, aldermen, newspaper reporters, and officers of His Majesty's army in hired rigs.

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE

BY HARRIET McEWEN KIMBALL

FAIR on our garden terrace, dear,
Amidst the winter snows
Blossoms the Christmas Rose;
And Christmas Day will soon be here.

The summer flowers long since are dead,
But now its time comes round,
And from the frozen ground
In snowy bloom it lifts its head.

The garden waste it heedeth not,
Nor yet the cruel blast,
But bravely holdeth fast,
And maketh fair that one sweet spot.

Almost it seems to me to say:
"Whatever others think,
However others shrink,
Why, I must bloom for Christmas Day.

"Though small indeed my offering
Of beauty and of praise,
In His appointed ways
I 'll pay my tribute to my King."

Fit emblem, dear, it is of you
To whom like charms belong;
So modest and so strong,
Unselfish, dutiful, and true!

So with the Christmas roses, dear,
My thoughts of you I blend
And with my greetings send;
For Christmas Day will soon be here.